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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/31/2017  
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SUBJECT: FRENCH NOT PREPARED TO ISSUE PUBLIC STATEMENT ON  
SYRIAN ACTIVIST RIAD SEIF, EU DEMARCHE DELIVERED AUGUST 29

REF: SECSTATE 119436

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt  
for reasons 1.4. (b), (d)

¶1. (C) France does not intend to issue a public declaration on Syrian dissident Riad Seif (reftel), according to French MFA Syria desk officer Jean-Christophe Auge. He indicated August 31 that France had delivered a joint EU demarche on August 29 to Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Miqdad asking that Riad Seif be allowed to leave Syria for urgent medical treatment. (Comment: The French charge led the group as representative of the EU presidency, since Portugal does not have diplomatic representation in Damascus. End comment) Miqdad reportedly claimed not to know about the case but said he would look into it and provide a response. Miqdad gave a standard and "wooden" Syrian sermon affirming that Syria's respect for human rights was at least as staunch as Europe's. Auge was dubious when asked whether the EU expected a quick answer.

¶2. (C) Auge added that EU COMs agreed that it would best serve Seif's interests not to publicize their demarche and recommended their capitals not issue statements. When asked whether the French embassy was in touch with Seif, Auge replied that it was. He explained, however, that such contact was often indirect, i.e., through family members.

¶3. (C) Comment: We note the inconsistency between what Saif asked us to do on his behalf and what the EU seems prepared to do. Auge did not indicate that EU reticence with respect to a more assertive stance on Riad Seif's case was due to France's concern not to antagonize the Syrians at this delicate phase in Lebanon, but we would not rule it out. France has made clear to Syria that it is willing to resume a bilateral dialogue as an incentive to Syria not to interfere in upcoming Lebanese presidential elections. In Paris' view, this is probably not the ideal time to needle the Syrians on a human rights case like Seif's, no matter how compelling it may be.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

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